

Welcome

Once again welcome to the worship of Tyndale Baptist Church – another week in this highly unusual period as we begin to anticipate a return to worship in the church building.

One of the greatest challenges facing us – apart from all the other measures., such as social distancing, masks etc – details are to follow – is communion. It is part of today's service, of course. It's been a bit odd, leading a communion service with no one in the room – and just as odd, I imagine, if you've joined in. After all, nothing demonstrates more powerfully the nature of Christian community than sharing one loaf of bread and one cup of wine – the very things we *can't* do apart.

Finding ways to do communion safely while remaining true to the meaning of the Lord's Supper is a challenge – but we shouldn't, perhaps, worry overmuch. It isn't dependent on the way we do it; it is, after all, an earthly sign of a heavenly reality – something that *God* has done, is doing...

It's the mystery at the heart of all worship, of course..it's *all* of God..and we respond

The first song puts us in the right frame of mind for doing so - thankfulness

['In the Lord I'll be ever thankful'](#)

Call to Worship

We will be thankful, we will rejoice, we will not be afraid, the Lord is near – that's the frame of mind, the frame of belief that surrounds us., as we come. But we are called to come. We are thankful *because God...*we rejoice *because God..is near, is known to us in Christ, is at work by His Spirit – and so we worship...*

BPW 68 ['Praise to the Lord, the almighty'](#)

Opening Prayer

Almighty, King of creation, reigning over all things, Lord – we worship you; great, traditional words that conjure up images of your greatness..prosperer and defender, sustainer and bringer of health and salvation – how good to hear again of the faith that burned in the hearts of men and women centuries ago, that burns in our hearts – Lord, we worship you. But we are not blind to the challenges of today; we cannot ignore the paradox of faith; our work does not always prosper – still we worship you; we are not always defended from the slings and arrows, still we worship you; we do not always enjoy health; we are not always conscious of our salvation – still we worship you –

Because we are in Christ – whose way was a suffering, humble, human way, of service and sacrifice – it is the way of God – Lord, still we worship you – that our work might be like his work of giving, that we might be defended from all falsehood; that we might be sustained in our faith; that we might be healed by being made whole; that we might be saved from falling – that we might remain in Christ – we worship you in His Spirit, by his holy name.

['In Christ alone'](#)

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Readings

[Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)

[Romans 6:15-23](#)

The Grace is said:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore, Amen.

Address

'Who we are now - in Christ'

Lord, we give you this time, may what is spoken ring with truth, may what is heard and understood be touched by your spirit, and may what is decided lead us on toward your Kingdom..Amen

An image from the recent clashes in Portland, Oregon. In the background, a line of armed, camouflaged, helmeted police/soldiers, with full face gas-masks, their weapons raised and pointed, both sides of a police car with a row of powerful spotlights

And in the foreground – a naked woman. Her back is to the camera and it's censored, but the force of the contrast is obvious – power – guns, vehicles, lights, posturing –

And vulnerability. She was a sex-worker apparently, so quite used to taking her clothes off in front of others, but still..vulnerability

I've no idea what happened after, except that, in the immediate, the forces were non-plussed and did nothing –

And I've no intention of getting into all the messy, US politics of all this – though that could occupy a good deal of my time this morning

Just the contrast and the vulnerability – as we come to consider who, as Christians, we are now.

In the weeks before, hopefully, we return to a semblance of normality at Tyndale, during what remains of the summer, after months of lockdown, after a period of reflection on 'the new world' in relation to God's Kingdom, as we contemplate the place of Christianity in this 'new normal' – as we mourn all that's been lost and look forward in hope,

Who are we now? For the next several weeks the very essence of being Christian will come centre stage – and it's answered quite simply, in fact..

Who are we now? We are 'in Christ'

There are lots of answers we could turn to, of course; we are believers in God; we are 'followers of Jesus'; we are adherents of a religion; we are saved, bible-believing, filled with the spirit; 'citizens of a new country'

But for me, this one definition sums it up – we are 'in Christ' –

Not that it actually occurs all that often in the New Testament; sometimes it's no more than a sort-of obvious way of describing someone, in a farewell, or greeting –

As when Paul says, Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers *in Christ* Jesus.' At the end of his letter to the Romans

Sometimes it comes with something else attached, as when, in Acts 24:24, Felix listened to Paul speak about *faith in Christ* Jesus.

But it lies behind much of what Paul says about those who have been baptised – and undergirds much of the complex argument in Paul's letter to the Romans

Basically the idea is quite simple – those who are 'in Christ' have moved out of the old human way of living – subject to the power of sin, to the jurisdiction of the Law (the law of Moses) and into the new way of – not so much of living – of *being* human

That's the kind of language he uses all over the place: '*dead to sin but alive in Christ*'; '*from now on we regard no one from the human point of view*'; '*now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God*'; '*buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life*'.

Complicated..but at heart very simple – no longer part of the old, dying, sinful human world, now part of the new, living, free human world 'in Christ'

Incorporated *into* Christ; identified *with* Christ; so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others

Let's not get bogged down in complicated arguments about different forms of baptism, different ways of organising the church, different styles of worship or kinds of service or levels of Christian experience and understanding

Let's just hold on to this; *now* we – whoever we are – if we identify with the Christian faith; if we follow the teachings of Jesus; if we wrestle with faith and doubt and offer our lives in service, great or small; if we try, however haltingly, to worship; if we know something of what it means to confess our sins and to taste forgiveness; if we have been touched by the waters of baptism and bowed our head in prayer and been thankful for what we have and savoured bread and wine (even if we've struggled to understand what's going on..)

Whoever we are – God knows who we are - we are *in Christ*..

Paul again - neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one *in Christ* Jesus...

Might we add – neither BAME nor white British, straight or gay or trans.. we are *in Christ* –

Oh, yes, there is much to discuss here, still – many debates to be had about the line between identity and behaviour, between personality and experience, between belief and understanding and opinion; different doctrines; different histories; different commitments

But overall we are *in Christ* – it's a mystery that lies behind all the visible churches and congregations in their huge variety of circumstances and situations; it unites all who can be seen in a Sunday pew or on a Zoom screen with all those whose faith remains hidden behind a thousand loyalties to all kinds of religious traditions *and* non-religious ways of life.

And it's not for us to know who's in and who's out – that's God's work, and God alone knows who, because of his endless love and inscrutable work in the human heart, are in Christ.

That's who, now, we are..as we consider all the implications of opening up again for worship at Tyndale and, hopefully, not much longer hence, for service at Tyndale, we are having to consider, with churches of every kind, how different it all might be

Some folk will be eager to return; others will be more nervous; practicalities will mean, inevitably, that for a time the church won't seem like, well, like the church..

Maybe some folk won't appear much at all; maybe others might look in who didn't previously have much to do with the church. There's a general awareness that there's a large number of people 'out there' who have been following on line services thanks to the anonymity of the internet who might never before have encountered Christian worship – perhaps one or two of them might show up..

To all of us, each one, the good news is that the people of God are 'in Christ'

And if, in this world I had to point to *one thing* that should mark them out – it's vulnerability.

In the face of the world's powers, be it state power or economic power or military power or peer pressure power or social media power or racist or misogynist power – those who are 'in Christ' are those who have chosen to be vulnerable.

It doesn't have to be that woman alone in Portland in front of stormtroopers. It could be...Dietrich Bonhoeffer returning to Nazi Germany from the safety of the US in 1939, to who-knew-what of service and sacrifice that awaited him.

It could be...any one of thousands of mission or aid workers who've found themselves up against the poverty and disease and corruption of half-the-world

It could be...you and me, refusing to join in with the litany of division and hostility that's all around or coming alongside one of those our society considers beyond the pale or just going about our daily business of living by faith.

And there'll be no army to help us; there'll be no audience approval or democratic mandate; no religious institution.

There'll just be us, with one another and with our common faith in the One who died, vulnerable, weak, vilified and alone,

But ultimately rising, to bring hope to all the world.

Paul writes, ' Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.'

So it is with all those who are 'in Christ' – that's who we are, now.

And if we are naked in the eyes of the world, we are clothed with the righteousness of God in Christ

And if we are surrounded with the greeds of the world, we have bread and wine - and we eat and drink in faith..and we proclaim the Lord's death until he come..

BPW 473 ' Brother, sister, let me serve you'

Tyndale virtual singing group

Offering & the peace

We give as a sign of generosity *and* of solidarity – in a world that more and more, it seems, echews such things in favour of self-preservation – and we give so as to share the things that make for peace.

'Lord we give you of ourselves in these and all our gifts and in the bread and wine – and as we give, we look to the transformation of the things of earth into the things of heaven'

Christ is our peace – we share a word of peace with one another

Communion

Introduction

As I say, it's a bit odd leading a communion service on my own – and it's bound to feel a bit odd taking part – however much we say 'together though apart'. Still, I hope you will join in – a small piece of bread and a glass or mug of something red. Of course it's largely symbolic, but we don't have to fret as some do that we aren't in a consecrated building at a consecrated altar with a blessed sacrament – for us, more or less any bread and wine or wine-substitute will do – and more or less anywhere will do – it's a sign of the reality of what God has done, is doing, will do – a Martini communion, if you like (if you can remember the 1970's advert) – anytime, anyplace, anywhere..

We pause in quiet

The table of the Lord is spread, it is for those who will come and see in broken bread and poured out wine – not mere symbols, but the very substance of his life shed for us on the Cross and raised again the third day. The risen Christ is present among his people and it is here that we meet him. The invitation is for all who are seeking him and who are weary of their sin and doubt to come and share the feast.

Confession

Lord our God, we humbly make confession. Lord, we are like scared children frightened of the dark – the silence scares us, and we run from it, pouring out words that obscure truth, hoping the sound of them will quell the silence – we find it hard to trust, we cast about for reassurance, we cannot rest in faith, we crave certainty, and sight.

Father forgive us and help us once again to hear the Word of Life; to brood and agonise and wrestle within ourselves, with each other, in our communities and our world, to hold the silence... and to rejoice at the coming of the Word and in the light of Christ (we pause in quiet)

Lord, you have spoken. Thanks be to God Amen

Institution

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you; the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, take, eat, this is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me. In the same way after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it in memory of me – for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Thanksgiving –

In this bread and wine we see the life and death of the Word made flesh – Lord, we thank you for your eternal goodness; your love for us, your life in us, your Son with us, your peace before us.

Lord, we thank you for life itself, and every good thing – out of which goodness we offer ourselves, and this bread and wine, and in thankfulness we take them to ourselves, to feed on Christ; we thank you, most of all, and always, for your most precious gift of He who is our life.

God our Father, pour out the Holy Spirit on all your people, that we may have faith, and upon these gifts of bread and wine and this eating and drinking, that here we may enter into the mysteries of the body and blood of our risen and ascended Lord – so that we may receive Christ to ourselves once again, for the strengthening of our faith, the assuring of our hope, and the deepening of our love.

Responses

Leader Here is bread
All **The foolishness of God in Christ;**
Leader Here is wine
All **Weakness stronger than our strength**
Leader Who will eat here?
All **Not many are wise; not many have power; few are noble – all are called, finding themselves chosen**
Leader Who will drink here?
All **The foolish, who will shame the wise; the weak, who will shame the strong, the poor in Spirit, whose is the Kingdom of heaven.**
Leader In the foolishness of God, before the world's flawed wisdom
All **We eat and drink in faith**

Bread & Wine

Prayer after communion

Lord, we have offered our gifts and ourselves. May we continue to give in your world. We pause in quiet

Lord **Hear our prayer**

Lord, we have confessed our failure to live as your redeemed people; may we now live for the world's redemption. We pause in quiet

Lord **Hear our prayer**

Lord, we have seen signs of wholeness out of brokenness and healing out of suffering. May we now bring this fresh vision of shared humanity to your world. We pause in quiet

Lord **Hear our prayer**

Lord, we have proclaimed strength in weakness and unity in all our variety and difference; now help us to live without prejudice and show such unity in the world. We pause in quiet

Lord **Hear our prayer**

Lord, we rejoice that we are 'in Christ'; may we always remain in Him. We pause in quiet

Lord **Hear our prayer**

BPW 535 [Lord, for the years'](#)

Blessing

So may the blessing of God almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us always.

Farewell & Thanks

Thanks for being a part of this service – thanks once again to Ian Holyer and Waddington, to Rachel Molyneux and a virtual singing group from Tyndale – and to Ken Stewart and Lesley Fuller

I wish you well for the coming week and express the hope that you might be able to enjoy some good – albeit restricted – summer days. Please continue to support each other as we all begin to look forward to gathering again at Tyndale in the coming weeks.